# LIBRARY JOURNAL

JULY 1991

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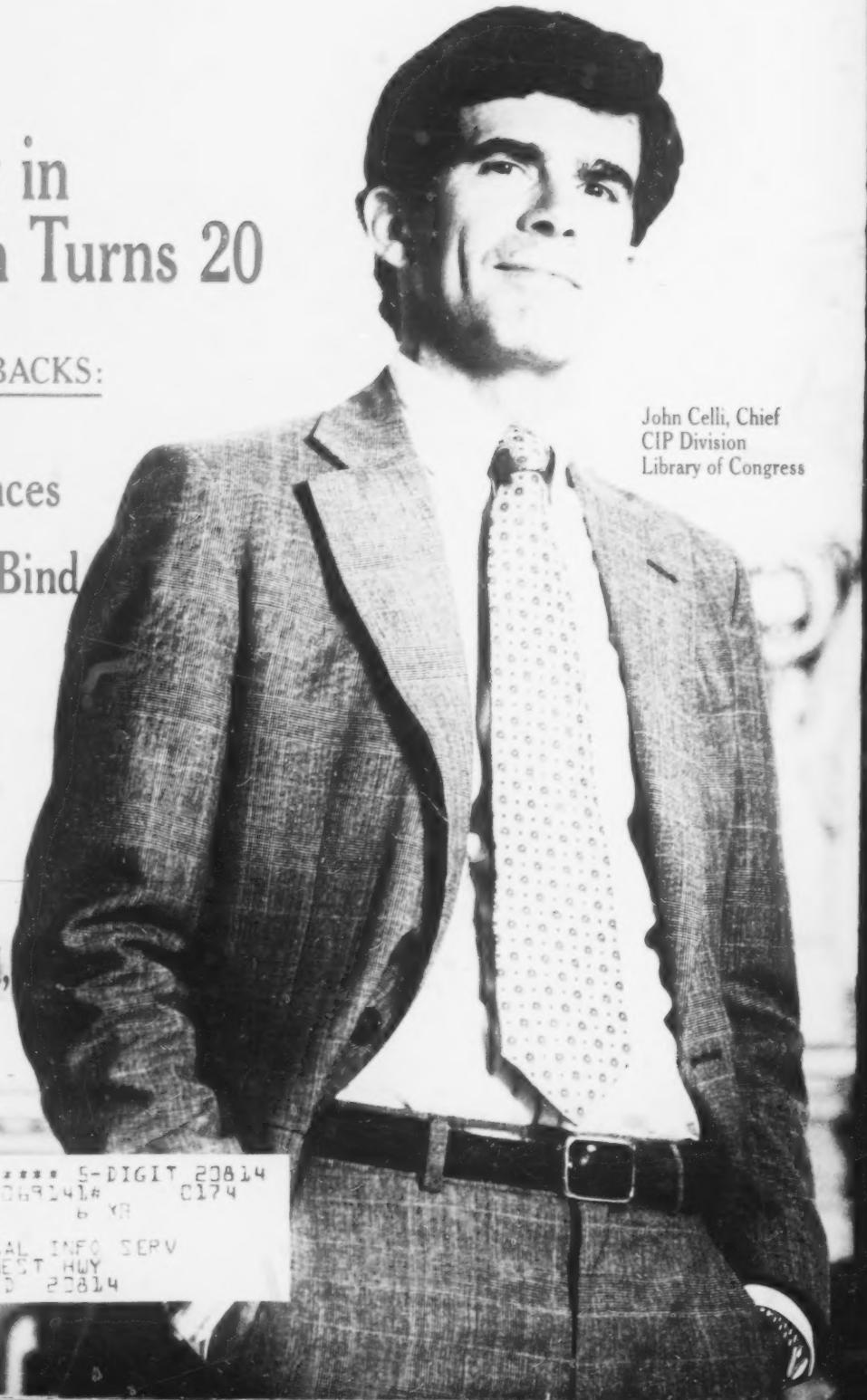

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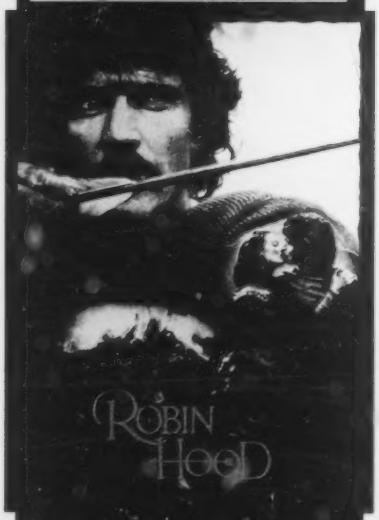


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***Library of Congress CIP Division Chief John Celli is proud of the work of the Cataloging in Publication Program. LC's Robert Newlen describes the history of the program in "Read the Fine Print: The Power of CIP" on page 38.***

PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHERINE LAMBERT

July 1991

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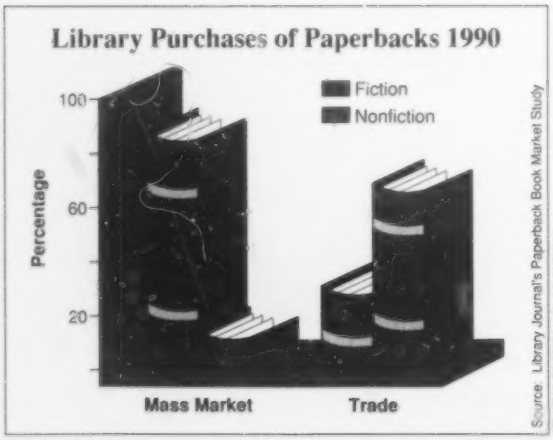
Mary Brenner

*Traditionally, librarians have preferred hardcovers, but they buy paperbacks not only to save money but to meet patron demand*

# THE PAPERBACK BIND

**By Barbara Hoffert**




PAPERBACKS have been available in America since Pocket Books was launched in June 1939, but not, assume many publishers, in libraries. Those flimsy covers and bindings were not thought to withstand the beating of repeated loans. In fact, as *LJ* confirmed in a recent survey of public libraries throughout the nation, most libraries do purchase paperbacks—and not just because the price is right. Though they appreciate the savings, librarians buy paperbacks primarily because their patrons want them.

So many patrons want paperbacks—whether they prefer the format itself or simply want materials not available in hardcover—that fully 95 percent of *LJ*'s respondents carried them. These libraries, representing nearly a quarter of the randomly selected sample of 1000 public libraries subscribing to *LJ* that received the survey, boasted an average book budget of $115,520 in 1990. Budgets ranged from under $10,000 to over $500,000 but were concentrated on the lower end of the scale, with 54.5 percent indicating budgets under $100,000.

On average, these libraries spent 17 percent of their budgets, or $19,638, on paperbacks, allocating eight percent of that figure to mass market and nine percent to trade paperback titles. According to the Book Industry Study Group (BISG), a nonprofit organization based in New York, in 1989 America's libraries spent $64 million on paperbacks.

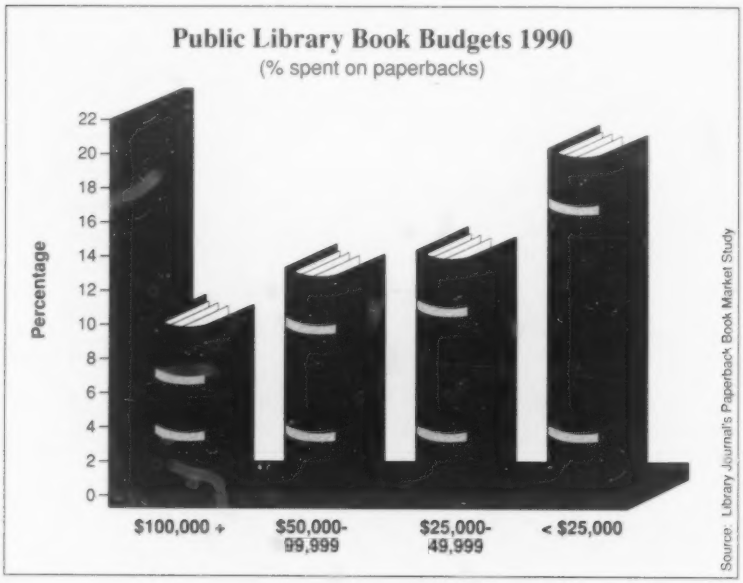
## Distinguishing formats

Libraries buy both mass market and trade paperback titles, which despite their sharing soft covers are handled differently by publishers. More often distributed by the independent wholesalers that also deliver newspapers and magazines to nonbook settings like supermarkets and airports, rack-sized mass market paperbacks are priced 30 to 50 percent lower than their trade paperback cousins. Like many magazines, they are sold monthly, and unsold copies are returned to the publisher by stripping the cover.

In contrast, trade paperbacks are distributed like hardcovers. They are sold seasonally, more often through traditional channels like bookstores and jobbers, and the whole book is returned when it is not sold. Generally, the higher price is justified by a larger format and the use of higher-quality paper.

Content, too, is often thought to be of higher quality in trade paperbacks. "Usually content has a lot to do with whether a book is done trade or mass," explains Carmela Pecone, director of educational sales at Avon Books. "Mass has mass appeal while trade is more specialized, representing the upscale part of that mass market." As a result, a typical mass market title may sell 100,000 copies and a trade paperback more likely 20,000 to 50,000 copies

Barbara Hoffert is Senior Editor, *LJ* Book Review




—a factor publishers must take into account when deciding on a format.

Because so many highly popular titles, including most genre titles, are published in mass market, this format is prized in many libraries despite its small size and sometimes inferior paper. Indeed, the libraries surveyed offered patrons an average of 2,713 mass market paperbacks, ranging from 643 titles for libraries with book budgets under $10,000 to 9650 titles for libraries with budgets over $500,000. Some 63 percent of those titles were for adults and, not surprisingly, an impressive 87 percent were fiction (see chart "Public Library Purchases of Paperbacks 1990," p. 51).

Higher quality but also higher priced and not read in such volume, trade paperbacks appear in smaller numbers on library shelves. *LJ*'s respondents offered an average of 1,792 trade paperback titles, ranging from 563 titles at libraries with smaller budgets to 4,562 titles at better-funded institutions. In contrast to mass market paperbacks, nearly 70 percent of trade titles were nonfiction. Clearly, mass market and trade paperbacks serve distinct audiences, and most librarians want both. A mere two percent said they carried only the former, and three percent, only the latter.

As some publishers are finally beginning to realize, libraries represent an important market for paperback books. According to BISG statistics, a quarter of all books purchased by public libraries are now paperbacks. Given the current economic downturn, such purchases will likely increase.

Dan Farley, vice president and publisher, Trade Paperbacks, Simon & Schuster (S. & S.), has evidence to support that claim. For simultaneous editions, with both the hardcover and paperback appearing at once, he has recently noticed "a distinct shrinkage in orders for the hardcover books from the direct library market and from wholesalers dealing with libraries." That is, many librarians are ordering the paperback even when the hardcover is available.

Many librarians concur. Notes Richard Tirotta, adult materials specialist, New York Public Library, "If there is an alternative, most branches will buy paper, especially with the current budget cuts." Other librarians find it cost-effective to replace worn-out hardcovers with paperbacks. "It's economical," explains Pamela Brown of Baltimore County's Towson branch, "and we would rather buy five fresh paperbacks." Indeed, the smaller a library's budget, the higher the percent spent on paperbacks (see chart "Public Library Book Budgets 1990," this page).

## Readers before budgets

But though librarians always appreciate a bargain, many are not buying paperbacks purely to save money. In fact, when asked to cite important criteria for selecting paperbacks, *LJ*'s respondents ranked only publisher/imprint name lower than price (see chart "Selection Criteria for Paperbacks 1990," p. 54). Patron demand, author's reputation, subject matter/topic, and quality/durability all beat out savings as criteria, suggesting that librarians are responding more to readers' needs than their own budgetary constraints when buying paperbacks. Further demonstrating that price is not at issue in such purchases, a quarter of the librarians not purchasing paperbacks argued that their budgets were too *small* for titles perceived as having such a short life.

If price were a main reason for purchasing paperbacks, surely most librarians would willingly replace exhausted hardcovers with spiffy yet inexpensive new paperbacks. But over half the librarians in *LJ*'s survey were noncommital about such replacements; only 20 percent said that they would probably replace hardcovers with paperbacks. Confirms Merle Jacob, head, adult collection development, Chicago Public Library, "The issue is not so much price. These days, libraries are going by what they need."

Evidently, librarians need paperbacks on their shelves to meet patron demand. Explains Brown, "We are thinking that there is a readership that is separate for paperbacks." When her branch recently integrated uncataloged paperbacks with the cataloged paperbacks and hardcovers, the circulation rate for paperbacks went down—strong evidence of an identifiable paperback readership.

To satisfy everyone, some librarians will go so far as to carry a popular title in *both* formats: a hardcover for the patron who wants to curl up in an armchair with a good, substantial book and a paperback for the adult anticipating a transcontinental flight or the teenager who finds the appealing softcover format less threatening. Other times they have no choice, buying paperbacks because "a great deal of popular material is not available in any other format," observes Fred Schlipf, director of the Urbana Free Library, Ill.

"We have an ethical mission to give patrons what they want," concludes Belleville Public Library (N.J.) Director David Bryant. "If they ask for paperbacks, and if we find paperbacks both attractive and easy to display, then price is not even relevant. That's what we buy."

Yet some librarians are still resistant. "We try to keep down the

number of paperbacks because they don't hold up," explains Lina Coffey, whose responsibilities include purchasing trade paperbacks for the Port Washington Public Library, N.Y. "We buy paperbacks in areas like art, science, and home repair that we need but that won't circulate heavily." Publishers counter that they are producing a better product than previously, and libraries should give them a chance. Argues Farley:

> The paperbound books available now are more durable than they were five or ten years ago, and more paperback publishers are delivering on that important combination of acid-free paper and heavier stock. Libraries can see for themselves that these paperbacks can withstand multiple loans.

If paperbacks are more durable than they once were, must librarians still bind them before putting them on the shelves? Some 45 percent of *LJ*'s respondents said they would add some kind of reinforcement, while another 43 percent claimed to do so occasionally. Still, certain considerations argue against it. "They're flimsy, but so are hardcovers," notes Schlipf. A simple strip of tape can do the trick, and Tirrota argues vehemently against more expensive alternatives: "It's cheaper to buy the hardcover!"

### More and more paperbacks

The explosion of paperbacks in libraries parallels their explosion on the American scene generally. "In 1956, Bowker's list of paperbacks was perhaps 96 pages," observes Ballantine VP and Editor-in-Chief Bob Wyatt. But adult paperback sales surged in the following years. According to American Association of Publishers (AAP) statistics, sales grew 342.5 percent between 1972 and 1980 and have stayed constant with hardcover sales since then. About a third of all titles published in 1988 were trade paperbacks (*PW*, Sept. 28, 1990).

Noting that a list of paperbacks currently in print could no longer be carried around as easily as that 1956 catalog, Wyatt exclaims, "It's wonderful. We complain about people not reading, but they must be. I think libraries have a lot to do with that."

But he also points out that the million-copy paperback best sellers so common ten or 15 years ago are a thing of the past. Competing in a more and more crowded marketplace, paperback publishers still dreaming of those blockbuster numbers have been stuck with a lot of unread books. "Right now, a 50 percent return is considered normal, which is frightening" observes Sally Richardson, senior VP, Subsidiary Rights, St. Martin's Press. As a result, St. Martin's is surveying its top wholesale customers to see what is selling best. "We are trying to publish fewer books," explains Richardson, "and get them in the right places."

### The making of the hard/soft deal

Mass market paperbacks were launched in June 1939, when Pocket Books revolutionized American publishing by issuing a series of popular reprints at popular prices in a softcover format. In the early 1950s, Jason Epstein, then at Doubleday, rev-

*Severn House repackages best-selling authors exclusively for the library market*

## The Reverse Deal: From Paperback to Hardcover

LIBRARIES ARE acquiring more and more paperbacks, but many readers still prefer the heft, spaciousness, and larger type of a hardcover book. They are particularly disappointed when titles by a favorite best-selling author appear only in paperback. Severn House, a U.K.–based publisher that has expanded into the U.S. market, has a remedy for this grievance. It buys the rights of existing mass market paperbacks, then publishes them in their first hardcover editions exclusively for the library market.

Founded in 1974 by Edwin Buckhalter, Severn House publishes a program of category fiction that embraces romance, both contemporary and historical, plus romantic suspense, mystery, Regency, horror, and sf. The authors whose early paperback titles have been resurrected in hardcover read like a veritable who's who of current best sellers, e.g., Charlotte Vale Allen, Jude Devereaux, LaVyrle Spencer, Elizabeth Peters, Fern Michaels, Catherine Coulter, and Eric V. Lustbader.

Buckhalter does careful research to decide what authors he should pursue, talking to librarians and library wholesalers about upcoming favorites and visiting libraries wherever he checks to see what books have been repeatedly date stamped. (Increasing computerization in libraries has thus made his job more difficult.) He then buys rights from the agent or publisher who has retained them, offering a standard hardcover royalty. He keeps down overhead by settling for small print runs, ultimately selling at most 2000 copies in this country and 1000 to 1500 in "what is traditionally called the Commonwealth market."

Severn House does strive for quality, however. Although it does not generally reset the type, instead blowing it up to readable proportions, it has instituted the use of permanent paper, acid-free binding, and stronger cover boards in response to library demand for a substantial product.

In the last few years, Buckhalter has made 25 trips to America, aiming to introduce American librarians to his books. Because they are mainly reprints—though he does do a small number of original titles—his books are generally not eligible for review. Getting the word out can thus be difficult, but Buckhalter has had some success. A small troop of librarians he encountered at *LJ*'s reception for those attending this year's American Booksellers Association (ABA) convention were so enthusiastic that one even proclaimed a desire to kiss his feet—"quite extraordinary when you think that I have been walking around the convention for three days."

"The popularity of our authors is such that libraries seem to want the durable copies that we can provide," observes Buckhalter. Librarians interested in more information on Severn House should contact Toronto-based publicity manager Inga Lubbock, 416-462-0652.

olutionized paperback publishing when he dreamed up the idea of the trade paperback, designed to bring readers quality titles at lower prices. Now the paperback format is also used to present original titles, ranging from mass market romances to literary novels published in trade format.

At first, hardcover and paperback houses were separate entities, with the former selling reprint rights to the latter. But as the major hardcover houses began buying up paperback houses in the 1970s and 1980s, paperback publishing changed. Explains Wyatt, "That made it possible for agents to offer hard/soft deals," negotiating both the hardcover and paperback rights when a book is first published. Houses that did not have a paperback division of their own were at a disadvantage.

Such considerations prompted St. Martin's Press to launch its own mass market program six years ago. "When agents like Mort Janklow or Lynn Nesbit had a big book, they were selling them hard/soft," observes St. Martin's Richardson. "You had to be able to publish both the hardcover and the paperback. When you can't come up with the huge money independently, but must depend on the rest of the world to auction the rights to, you aren't in control of your own fate."

Certainly, not all books are published hard/soft, but "it is moving toward the predominant deal," notes Wyatt. Paperback houses not associated with hardcover emporiums can thereby suffer. "Paperback houses need to publish more and more originals because there are so many hard/soft houses now," explains Avon's Pecone. "They must create their own product for their audience because they can't buy it."

Confirms S. & S.'s Farley, "With more books being retained by publishers who know that among their various imprints they can find the right format for a work, fewer books are being sold on the reprint market. The competition for those books is fierce." Furthermore, though these publishers want to keep their own best titles, they don't want to be thought of as reprinting *only* their own books. So they look for a good mix of in-house and outside reprints, again upping the ante. "Combine a little ego and list building needs, and it can get quite pricey," notes Farley.

Aside from mixing in-house and outside titles, hard/soft publishers also want their paperback programs to mix original titles and reprints. "We do about a third originals, a third hard/soft buys, a third from other hardcover houses," notes Richardson, describing the ideal balance some publishers have difficulty finding in the tight reprint market.

## Choosing a format

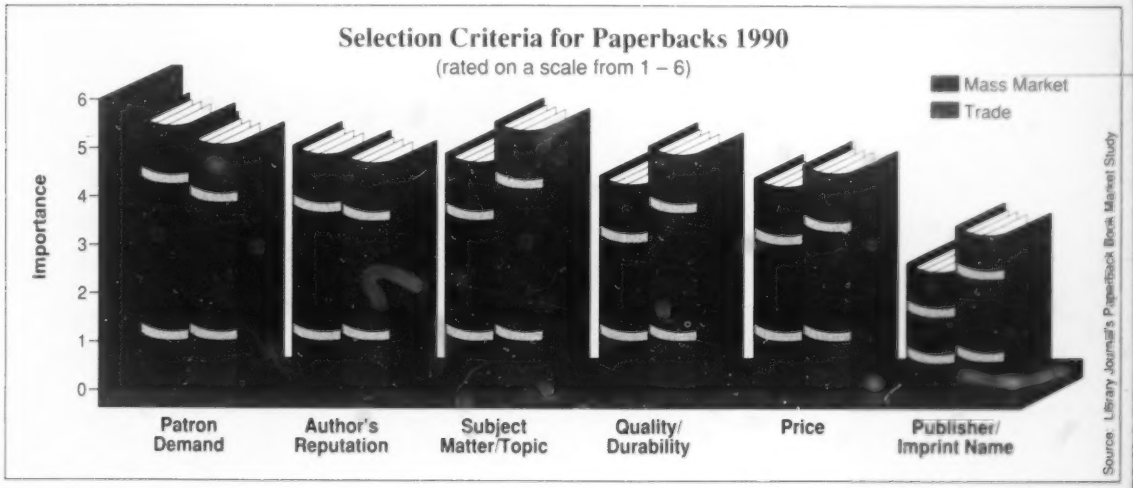
How does a publisher decide whether a book should be published as a mass market or trade paperback, in a simultaneous or a phased edition, with hardcover preceding the paperback? The answer is not clear-cut. Martha Levin, VP, Anchor Books, argues that "it comes instinctively from experience," but she is able to give some guidelines: "Certain books lend themselves to the paperback format given price point and subject matter."

Avon's Pecone elaborates: "You ask yourself, 'Can I sell X amount of this book in mass market?' " A popular romance would probably earn back its costs more successfully in that format than as a higher-priced trade paperback. But a book about an archaeological expedition to Africa would definitely do better in the latter format: "The audience for that book can bear the price, and the publisher can still profit with a sale of 15,000 copies, but it wouldn't sell in the ID market"—the market served by independent wholesalers who generally distribute mass market titles.

Evidently, a book's format is greatly influenced by its prospective readers. S. & S.'s Farley believes that in areas like business careers, self-help, and inspiration, coming out immediately with a trade paperback original is preferable to wasting time on a short hardcover run.

Levin finds that "biography is a hardcover market" and that "fiction is a very tough market right now in trade paperback as well as hardcover. We only do about ten percent fiction and try to cluster it," grouping, say, all multicultural titles in a single promotional pitch.

Most paperback publishers at hard/soft houses sit on editorial boards, helping to decide whether a prospect would best be published as, say, a hardcover title followed by a mass market paperback or as a trade paperback original. They might also conclude that a title belongs at another house altogether. "Every house has



its own strengths," explains Richardson. "Before I sold to mass market, I never understood when people would say, 'We can't do it; it's a Berkley sort of book.' You just get a reputation because of your editors or sales staff, and you have credibility in that area."

St. Martin's is currently strong in true crime, and upscale business books show promise. Richardson also has confidence in its fiction list, arguing that "mass market is more entertainment-oriented, more commercial, and that means fiction to me." She predicts "a real move to quality" in the mass market arena as readers tire of indistinguishable commercial fare.

### Simultaneous feats

Publishers who want to attract reviewer attention and get orders from places like libraries still demanding the sturdier binding are opting for the simultaneous edition, offering a limited hardcover print run along with the paperback. Explains Farley, "Though many significant books have been launched as paperback originals, there remains a bias in a segment of the book review community [against paperbacks] that makes it tougher to launch a book of substance in that format." The simultaneous edition overcomes that bias while essentially issuing the title as a trade paperback.

For the time being, publishers will likely assure recognition of their most treasured titles by continuing to launch major fiction, as well as serious works in areas like history, social science, and current affairs, as hardcovers. In many instances, however, hardcovers are making less and less economic sense.

"I have questions now about the efficacy of the hardcover edition," observes Farley. "Publishers can't afford to do hardcovers just for the reviewers, when the paperback is after all the dominant edition." But despite the effort to attract reviewers, S. & S.'s hardcover print runs for simultaneous editions are determined largely by prepublication orders from wholesalers serving libraries, which would lose out if simultaneous publications disappeared.

### Pitching paperbacks to libraries

Publishers actively promoting paperbacks to libraries are definitely on the cutting edge. As Levin notes, "We think about it, but we are not yet sure how to do it effectively." Given current economic realities, many publishers should be eager to learn. Argues Farley, a strong advocate of paperbacks in libraries, "Many publishers don't yet recognize that sales can be had not only in bookstores. The current economic downturn should push them to look at every way that they can sell books and sell books cleanly. Library markets represent such a sale."

When Jean Terry came to St. Martin's as a sales representative nine months ago, she found addressing the library market "a natural transition." She had sold to a library rental program while managing a bookstore and become involved in her children's school libraries. Now coordinating paperback sales to library jobbers, Terry helps organize reading programs and keeps jobbers apprised of every new publicity angle.

> Publishers that actively promote paperbacks to libraries are still on the cutting edge

Terry feels that, particularly with current federal budget cuts, paperbacks have a big future in libraries. "A lot of publishers are ignoring this," she observes. "The buyers who solicit libraries will tell you that. But we have wonderful things coming out I want to push. When other publishers recognize that they are missing out, we will be at the top."

Avon's Pecone, however, adds a note a caution to this new-found enthusiasm for promoting paperbacks to libraries:

> Good library sales don't justify a rush to publishing specifically for the library market. Many libraries demand reviews, which are often not available for paperbacks, whether reprint or original. When there is a choice, they still usually prefer to buy the hardcover. But with current budgetary restrictions, libraries are more and more predisposed to paperbacks, particularly in young adult and genre areas. The fact that I am at Avon [as director of sales and marketing to libraries, schools, and colleges] indicates their concern with the library market.

### What do libraries want?

For paperback publishers wondering how best to exploit that market, the respondents to *LJ*'s survey had a host of answers that can be neatly summed up in two points: guarantee better-quality paper and binding and give as much advance notification as possible, particularly through reviews and advertisements in trade journals. In turn, librarians who are buying paperbacks should be aware that the format is ever-changing. This fall, for instance, Bantam is introducing a new paperback format. Faced with a crowded marketplace and even more crowded shelf space in bookstores and libraries, it has launched a trade paperback line slimmed down to a mass market format. The new format promises quality in production values and content but lower prices and a smaller trim size for easy display.

But is this new format really all that new? Pointing out that trim size has always varied for paperbacks, Ballantine's Wyatt advises:

> Take the old Vintage books. They were mass market size, but they were trade paperbacks, issued by a hardcover company and distributed along with the hardcovers. The paper in a trade paperback can be as bad as in some mass market books. The type in some mass markets could be even larger. Do trade paperbacks represent quality literature? Come on. You have Clyde Edgerton, Jon Hassler, Lee Smith in mass market. And though the mass market books are distributed through mass market sales departments, now we have our own trade paperback line distributed through the same group.

On the other hand, for some upscale trade paperbacks like oversized art books priced at $35, Farley envisions the use of 100-lb. paper, French folds, and flaps "both to prettify them and allow them to be presented like hardcovers." Even as librarians grapple with how best to purchase, display, and maintain paperbacks on their shelves, publishers are subtly redefining just what a paperback is. Whatever they decide, the paperback is here to stay in libraries. Not only is it an economical alternative in recessionary times, but it gives library patrons exactly what they want.

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